



Observatoire ARGA

**INTERPOL and cryptocurrency crimes:  
mandate, limitations, and risks of using international search  
mechanisms**

Author:

Sergei Khrabrykh — President of ARGA, PhD

Organization: Observatoire ARGA – Sanctions and Compliance Unit

Mailing address: 21 route de l'Aviation, 12 C, 64600 Anglet, FRANCE

Contacts: [info@argaobservatory.org](mailto:info@argaobservatory.org), +33 7 58 49 62 27

Website: [www.argaobservatory.org](http://www.argaobservatory.org)

Paris, 15 January 2026

## **Table of Contents**

<b><i>Abstract</i></b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b><i>Introduction</i></b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b><i>Legal mandate of INTERPOL</i></b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b><i>INTERPOL tools: Notices and Diffusions</i></b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b><i>Cryptocurrency cases and the problem of legal qualification</i></b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b><i>Risks of politicization in economic crypto cases</i></b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b><i>Limitations of INTERPOL in investigating crypto crimes</i></b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b><i>Fragmentation of information and absence of a comprehensive picture</i></b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b><i>Consequences for victims of crypto crimes</i></b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b><i>Use of INTERPOL in the sanctions and financial context</i></b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b><i>Control and appeal procedures</i></b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b><i>International practice and recurring patterns</i></b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b><i>Political and economic dimension of the use of INTERPOL mechanisms</i></b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b><i>Risks for persons subject to international search</i></b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b><i>Institutional limits of INTERPOL reform</i></b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b><i>Conclusions</i></b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b><i>Recommendations</i></b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b><i>List of sources and materials used</i></b> .....	<b>8</b>

## Abstract

This report analyzes the role of INTERPOL in cases related to cryptocurrency crimes, including fraud, money laundering, sanctions evasion, and transnational financial schemes. It examines the organization's legal mandate, the practical limitations of its instruments (Notices, Diffusions), and the risks of politicization and misuse of INTERPOL mechanisms in economic and political-economic conflicts. Particular attention is given to the mismatch between the cross-border nature of crypto crimes and INTERPOL's institutional capabilities, as well as the consequences of this gap for victims, suspects, and member states.

## Introduction

INTERPOL is traditionally regarded as a key element of international police cooperation. In public perception, the organization is often associated with the global search for criminals and coordination in combating serious transnational crime.

However, in the context of cryptocurrency crimes, INTERPOL's role remains limited and is often misinterpreted. The growth of crypto fraud, cross-border financial schemes, and grey economic cases has revealed a structural mismatch between states' expectations and the actual capabilities of international police mechanisms.

## Legal mandate of INTERPOL

INTERPOL is not a supranational law enforcement body. The organization:

- does not initiate criminal cases;
- does not conduct investigations;
- does not carry out arrests;
- does not possess judicial authority.

Its function is to facilitate information exchange and coordination between national law enforcement agencies within the framework of its constitution and data processing rules.

A key limitation of its mandate is the prohibition on activities of a political, military, religious, or racial character, which becomes particularly significant in cases at the intersection of economics, cryptocurrency, and state power.

## INTERPOL tools: Notices and Diffusions

The primary tools of INTERPOL are:

- Notices (including Red Notices);
- Diffusions.

In the context of crypto crimes, these tools are used for:

- issuing alerts regarding wanted persons;
- requesting information;
- coordinating actions between countries.

At the same time, Notices are not arrest warrants and do not replace national procedural decisions. Their legal effect depends entirely on the legislation of the specific state.

## Cryptocurrency cases and the problem of legal qualification

One of the key issues is the legal qualification of crypto crimes. In international practice, they are often framed as:

- fraud;
- money laundering;
- economic crimes;
- tax violations.

Such qualification formally places cases outside the direct prohibition on political matters; however, in practice many of them carry a pronounced political-economic context related to asset redistribution, corporate conflicts, or pressure on businesses.

## Risks of politicization in economic crypto cases

In some cases, INTERPOL mechanisms are used in matters where:

- criminal prosecution is initiated within the framework of a corporate conflict;
- crypto assets serve as the object of asset redistribution;
- law enforcement is selective in nature.

This creates a risk of violating principles of neutrality and undermines trust in the system of international cooperation.

## Limitations of INTERPOL in investigating crypto crimes

INTERPOL does not possess:

- blockchain analytics tools;

- access to exchange data;
- mechanisms for freezing digital assets.

All substantive investigative work is carried out by national authorities and private companies, while INTERPOL performs an auxiliary and coordinating role.

## Fragmentation of information and absence of a comprehensive picture

In crypto cases, information is distributed among:

- national law enforcement agencies;
- financial intelligence units;
- private analytics companies;
- exchanges and payment providers.

INTERPOL does not have the authority to consolidate this data into a single case file, which leads to fragmentation of information and loss of a holistic understanding of the scheme.

## Consequences for victims of crypto crimes

The limited role of INTERPOL directly affects the position of victims. The absence of a unified mechanism for:

- registering victims;
- consolidating claims;
- supporting compensation procedures

results in a significant number of victims remaining outside the international legal framework.

## Use of INTERPOL in the sanctions and financial context

Despite increasing sanctions pressure, INTERPOL is not a sanctions body. Attempts to use its mechanisms to reinforce sanctions regimes encounter:

- limitations of its mandate;
- the risk of conflating criminal and political dimensions;
- differences in approaches among member states.

In crypto cases, this is particularly evident, as sanctions and criminal dimensions often intersect.

## Control and appeal procedures

Within INTERPOL's structure, procedures exist for overseeing data processing, including applications to the Commission for the Control of Files (CCF). These mechanisms play a key role in:

- protecting individual rights;
- identifying politically motivated cases;
- correcting improper requests.

In crypto cases, the significance of these procedures increases due to the complexity of legal qualification and the high risks of misuse.

## International practice and recurring patterns

Analysis of international practice reveals consistent patterns:

- initiation of requests within the framework of economic conflicts;
- use of crypto assets as a formal basis for criminal proceedings;
- disproportion between search measures and the nature of the accusations.

These patterns require systematic analysis and institutional response.

## Political and economic dimension of the use of INTERPOL mechanisms

In some cases, INTERPOL becomes involved in a broader political and economic process in which criminal prosecution is used as a tool of pressure, asset redistribution, or resolution of corporate conflicts. Cryptocurrencies in such cases serve as a convenient formal object of accusation, giving the process the appearance of a neutral economic dispute.

The use of crypto assets as grounds for initiating a case makes it possible to:

- move the process outside the framework of direct political persecution;
- formally justify an international search;
- engage INTERPOL mechanisms without overt violation of constitutional limitations.

As a result, economic and corporate conflicts acquire a criminal framework, and mechanisms of international police cooperation are used in a context for which they were not originally designed.

## Risks for persons subject to international search

For individuals involved in crypto cases, the use of INTERPOL mechanisms entails a number of specific risks:

- restriction of freedom of movement without a judicial conviction;
- detention based on national discretion;
- freezing of accounts and assets within parallel procedures;
- prolonged status as a wanted person without procedural progress.

At the same time, avenues for appeal are time-limited and depend on the quality of legal argumentation and access to international procedures.

## Institutional limits of INTERPOL reform

Despite ongoing efforts to modernize procedures and strengthen oversight of requests, INTERPOL remains structurally limited:

- it lacks its own investigative function;
- dependence on national authorities persists;
- preliminary review procedures do not always identify the political and economic context of a case;
- there is no mechanism for automatically taking into account the interests of victims of crypto crimes.

Without a reassessment of approaches to economic and crypto cases, these limitations will continue to be reproduced systematically.

## Conclusions

INTERPOL plays an important but strictly limited role in cases related to cryptocurrency crimes. The mismatch between the cross-border nature of crypto crimes and the organization's institutional capabilities leads to fragmentation of information, risks of politicization, and erosion of trust in mechanisms of international cooperation.

Particularly vulnerable are cases in which crypto assets are used as a formal pretext for criminal prosecution within broader political and economic conflicts. In such situations, INTERPOL mechanisms require especially careful legal assessment and procedural oversight.

## Recommendations

- Strengthening preliminary legal assessment of requests related to cryptocurrencies and economic crimes.
- Clear differentiation between criminal and political-economic cases when applying Notices and Diffusions mechanisms.
- Expanding the role of CCF procedures as a tool for protecting rights and filtering improper requests.
- Increasing transparency in INTERPOL's interaction with national authorities in crypto cases.
- Institutionalizing mechanisms for taking victims' interests into account in international procedures.

## List of sources and materials used

1. <https://www.interpol.int/How-we-work/Notices>
2. <https://www.interpol.int/Who-we-are/What-is-INTERPOL>
3. <https://www.interpol.int/How-we-work/Data-protection>
4. <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/topics/virtual-assets.html>
5. <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/publications/Fatfrecommendations/targeted-update-virtual-assets-vasps-2023.html>
6. <https://www.chainalysis.com/blog/2026-crypto-crime-report-introduction/>
7. <https://www.trmlabs.com/reports-and-whitepapers/2026-crypto-crime-report>
8. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2022/09/crypto-assets-regulation>
9. <https://argaobservatory.org>